

LINKING PSYCHOLOGY CURRICULUM WITH CAREER SKILLS

Linking Psychology Curriculum with Career Skills

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ABSTRACT

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A psychology degree remains a popular option for undergraduate students. This demonstrates the appeal of a degree that pertains to an understanding of social constructs, individual motivation, statistical analysis, research design, and problem-solving. Notwithstanding the numerous skills undergraduate psychology students gain in their studies, they remain chronically underemployed in the workforce. A possible explanation for the underemployment of undergraduate students involves a closer look at the transferable skills acquired by undergraduate psychology core courses. It is the intent of this study to grasp a better understanding of what knowledge, skills, and abilities, and other characteristics (KSAOs) students gain from undergraduate psychology courses. Psychology SMEs rated the extent to which KSAOs are obtained through the undergraduate psychology curriculum. This data will then be used to design a KSAO crosswalk that provides students a resource to identify KSAOs acquired during their psychology education, and consequently, understand the practical and transferable implementations of these sought-after workplace skills.

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Psychology degrees are known for their popularity among undergraduate students and have continually ranked among the most popular majors in America (e.g., National Center for Education Statistics, 2019). Despite this popularity, there seems to be misconceptions circulating about psychology degree holders and their lack of employability with an undergraduate degree. This is problematic as a majority of psychology undergraduates (56%) do not choose to continue onto graduate school (American Psychological Association, 2018). Instead, many undergraduates go on to join the workforce after graduation but work in jobs in which they are classified as “underemployed” (e.g., The Ladders, 2019) which reinforces the popular belief that psychology undergraduates do not possess the necessary knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAOs) to have a successful career. Therefore, it is essential to gain a better idea of what KSAOs students gain from undergraduate psychology classes and how those KSAOs translate to meaningful employment.

The American Psychological Association established learning goals, such as developing communication and scientific inquiry skills, essential for achieving a bachelor’s degree in psychology (American Psychological Association, 2013). However, the limited published research into what exact KSAOs students develop in their psychology courses prompted the current investigation to evaluate the extent to which various KSAOs are developed through the curriculum for psychology classes. This investigation involved a systematic review of the the O*NET 25.0 Database containing information on the 167 KSAOs for 974 occupations regularly updated by occupation experts. This full list of KSAOs were consolidated by subject matter experts (SMEs) to those most relevant to psychology undergraduates using a 10-point scale evaluating the level to which students would be expected to develop the KSAO in an undergraduate psychology curriculum. This process resulted in a list of 41 KSAOs that were then evaluated against course descriptions and syllabi of core psychology classes in order to determine the level of each of the 41

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KSAOs students gained by completing each course. The “Level Anchor Scale” from O*NET was adapted to anchor the rating scales and differences of more than one point were reconciled through a mediated discussion among the SEMs to obtain agreed upon ratings.

Based on the SMEs’ reconciled ratings of KSAOs, a matrix, or crosswalk, will be built that allows students to understand the skills and aptitudes they gained in their undergraduate psychology courses to potential employers. Students will be able to search course titles and determine which KSAOs they have acquired from the curriculum. Understanding the skills they now possess, psychology undergraduates can proactively think about potential occupations, hone and develop important skills, and market themselves to professional environments.

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